

# NAVY MEDICAL HEROES OF MIDWAY

***By Andre Sobocinski, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery historian***

*June 4, 2017 marks the 75th anniversary of arguably, the most pivotal naval battle in history. The one-day battle reversed the tide of World War II in the Pacific, six months after Pearl Harbor. Following the Battle of Midway, Japanese Imperial Forces were on the defensive for the remainder of the war. Although U.S. forces suffered significant losses, the outcome extinguished any prospects of threats to Hawaii and the west coast. Below are excerpts and commendations highlighting Navy medical officers who served as heroes during this battle.*



*Survivors of USS Hammann (DD-412) being brought ashore at Pearl Harbor from USS Benham (DD-397). (Photo courtesy of BUMED Historian).*

**Lt. j.g. Edward Augustus Kearney, U.S. Navy Medical Corps (1910-1985)**

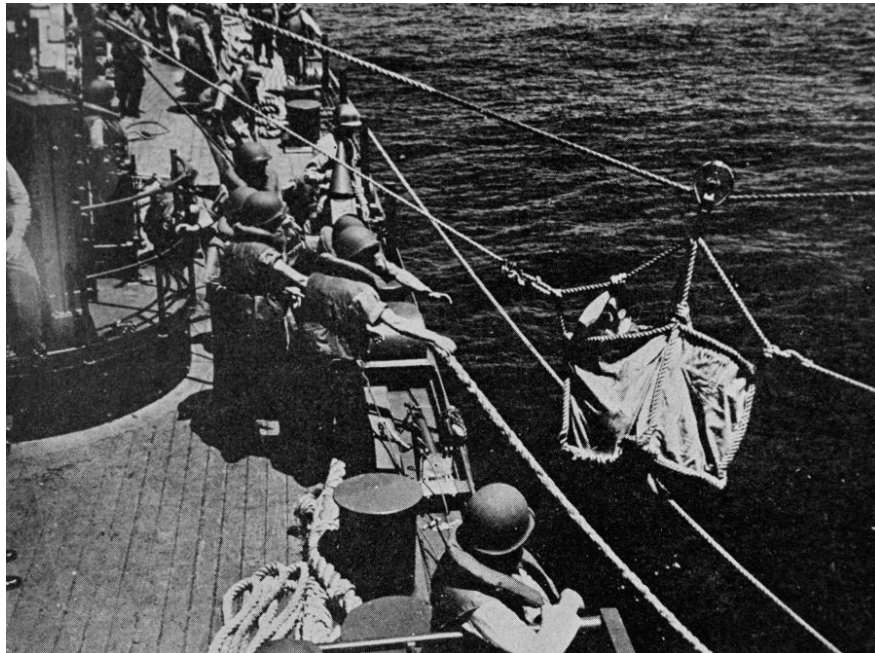
**Born: 1910 in Bronx, New York**

**Activity: USS *Yorktown* (CV-5), Battle of Midway**

**Awards: Silver Star**

Aside from his attention to duty during the attacks on the ship and his efforts in evacuating wounded during the subsequent abandonment, Dr. Kearney displayed qualities which caused him to stand out from

any average young officer of his years and experience. He was tireless all night on the rescue destroyer in his efforts to alleviate suffering and to care for the wounded. He volunteered to return aboard as a member of the salvage party, had entire charge of preparing the dead aboard for burial and was cool and collected during the subsequent submarine torpedoing. He showed no hesitancy in volunteering to again return aboard and, when that was frustrated by the ship's sinking, he was transferred to the USS *Benham* where he became the medical officer in charge of some 70 wounded, 45 of whom were in critical condition. His devotion to duty and professional skill as a surgeon, while working without the normal facilities of a sickbay or operating room, are solely responsible for these people reaching port and the Naval Hospital alive.[1]



*During the Battle of Midway, wounded were transferred from small craft to large ships that had more complete hospital or first-aid facilities. (Photo courtesy of BUMED Historian)*

**Lt. j.g. John H. Peterson**

**Activity: USS *Hammann* (DD-412), Battle of Midway**

**Award: Silver Star**

Peterson served as medical officer aboard the destroyer USS *Hammann* (DD-412), during and after action against enemy Japanese forces in the vicinity of Midway Islands on June 6, 1942. Although he had been struck down and slightly injured by the shock of a torpedo explosion, Lieutenant Peterson, after abandonment of the sinking ship, persisted in manning a boat and directing the rescue of many seriously wounded men who might otherwise have drowned. For three days afterward he rendered constant medical attention to a great number of wounded and injured men aboard another destroyer en route to

its base until the strenuous exertion from his efforts weakened him to a point of complete physical exhaustion. Lieutenant Peterson's gallant action and devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.[2]

*Commendations:*

Chief Pharmacists Mate Fred S. Epstein, USNR, USS *Yorktown*

Chief Pharmacists Mate James R. Wilson, USN, USS *Yorktown*

Pharmacists Mate 1st Class Robert W. Harned, USN, USS *Yorktown*

Pharmacists Mate 2nd Class H. Devere, USNR, USS *Yorktown*

Pharmacists Mate 3rd Class G.C. Shaefer, USN, USS *Yorktown*



*Corpsmen treating casualties on board USS Yorktown (CV-5), shortly after the carrier had been hit by Japanese bombs on June 4, 1942. The dead and wounded were members of the crew of I-1. They were struck by fragments from a bomb that exploded on the flight deck just aft of the midships elevator. (Photo courtesy of BUMED Historian)*

1 Executive Officer's Report of Action for Period of June 4-June 7, 1942. USS *Yorktown*.

2 Medical Officer Decorations, BUMED Archives.